

their mind his attitude towards Americans. He said, "Americans are the most cowardly of God's creatures. They are an easy quarry, praise be to God. We ask God to enable us to kill and capture them."

That was his letter to al-Qaeda, February 2004. Americans, the most cowardly of creatures? You know, in this entire conflict, the battle in the global war on terror, in the breadth of Afghanistan and Iraq and all points in between and the periphery of all of those, I have yet to hear of a single incident of an cowardly American soldier.

I mean, it may have happened. But I have not heard of a single incident. I have only heard of bravery and courage and sacrifice. And each quarter, I never let it be longer than that, I go to visit our wounded Americans in places like Bethesda, Walter Reed and Landstuhl there in Germany. And when I go in to visit those wounded soldiers, they give me strength, they give me inspiration. They believe in this cause, and we must not let them down.

And most of them feel guilty that they were wounded, because now they are not with their men. Most of them want to go back to their unit. In fact, we have had amputees that have gone back to their unit and engaged in combat again. That is the kind of inspiration, that is what Americans are about.

Zarqawi could not be more wrong. I am happy to say today he could not be more dead. I yield to the gentleman from New Mexico.

Mr. PEARCE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Iowa. I would remind the body that we had warning signs. Just because Mr. Zarqawi is no longer part of the conspiracy of al-Qaeda, the war of terrorism, just because of that, that does not mean this struggle is over.

Again, the war on terror started in 1972 with the Munich Olympics. At that point, the world negotiators gave the terrorists center stage. They allowed them to come to the table. That was a mistake that we continued all of the way up through President Bush, almost 30 years of giving them credibility instead of trying to dismantle the operation.

So I would remind our viewers that this is not going to be an easy task, even with this significant loss this week. And I would yield back to the gentleman from Iowa to close the discussion.

Mr. KING of Iowa. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from New Mexico for joining me and raising his voice and standing up for United States of America.

Mr. Speaker, I have this one quick chart that I am going to run through quickly. That is, the Iraq numbers again for civilians, 27.51 for 100,000.

Where is the place most comparable to that in the United States today? Oakland, California. If you are safe in Oakland, that is about how safe they feel in Iraq today with the exception of the national news media's exceptions.

God bless our troops. I yield back.

30-SOMETHING WORKING GROUP

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DANIEL E. LUNGREN of California). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, it is an honor being before the House once again. As you know, the 30-something Working Group, we come to the floor as often as possible to not only share with the Members what is going on as it relates to legislation here in Washington, D.C., but also what is not going on on behalf of the American people.

And hopefully we can put forth ideas and extending the arm to work in a bipartisan way on behalf of the American people. So we are glad to come to the floor week after week. Also, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Democratic Leader for allowing us to have this hour, and also our Democratic Whip, Mr. STENY HOYER, and Mr. JAMES CLYBURN, who is our chairman of our Democratic Caucus, and Mr. LARSON, who is our vice-chair.

I think it is important that we come to the floor to share a unified message from this side, that we are willing and able. We have the will and the desire to work on behalf of the American people in general. Not just Democrats, not just Republicans or independents, but the American people in general, to make sure the people of good will prevail in their everyday lives.

If they are a veteran, if they are an individual that has fallen on hard times, if they run a small business in this country, if they have a mid-sized business that they want to turn into a big business, we want to be able to be of some assistance as it relates to legislating here on behalf of the American people.

Also, I think it is important that we do not leave our children behind. Even though they cannot vote, many of them are under the age of 18 years old, not eligible to vote, I think it is important that we stand for them.

There are a number of things that I am going to try to touch on today, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that we can cover all of, just about all of what is happening and what is not happening here in Washington, D.C.

Mr. Speaker, I took the time when we were on break last week to really look closely at some of the comparisons, because when you are trying to figure out what is happening to the issues that we all came to Washington to work so hard on, you have to compare, it is almost like you have to have, Mr. Speaker, a side-by-side what we call it here in Washington, D.C. to compare.

It is almost like for someone who goes to the grocery store to buy an orange, I am from Florida, nine times out of ten, you are going to pick up those

two oranges if they are from two different orange groves and kind of compare, to see if it is an orange.

You are not going to grab an apple and grab an orange and start saying, well, which one looks like an orange. But I must say here in Washington, D.C., it is almost like an orange and an apple experience, because we are so far apart as it relates to working together on many of these issues that are facing our constituents back home, and the American men and women that are overseas fighting on our behalf.

Mr. Speaker, I looked at the issue of fiscal responsibility, and I could not help but notice, within the House GOP budget, that the budget calls for deficits as far as the eye can see, never achieving a balance. And adding another \$2.3 trillion to the national debt over 5 years, compared to the Democratic alternative and the Democratic philosophy, if we can work in a bipartisan way to be able to balance this budget, balance the budget over the next 5 years, making sure that we can balance it over the next 6 years on a pay-as-you-go philosophy.

□ 1630

Mr. Speaker, I will talk a little bit about that as I continue to go down this chart. We believe that we can balance this budget because we have done it before, unlike the Republican conference or the Republican side of the House which has not.

There was a surplus when the Republicans took control of this House or when the President went into office and President Bush went into office. Now we are into record deficits, and I think it is important that we point this out. And I have charts to be able to break that down for the Members.

I think it is also important to think about making America safer here at home. I looked at the Republican budget, and I could not help but notice that it made homeland security cuts by \$488 million this year, and it is up to \$6.1 billion over the next 5 years of cuts to homeland security. And it is not much better than the President's budget that came out of this House. It estimated that port security grants and rail transit security grants will all be rolled into a smaller program. And I think that that is something that is going to hurt a lot of local communities.

On the Democratic side in our budget and our motion to recommit of our philosophy as it relates to what we should be doing by the homeland is to provide \$6.5 billion more over the next 5 years for homeland security here by guaranteeing funding for border security, port security, and first responders which are so important to so many counties and local governments that are out there on the frontline that have to respond to the American people in their time of need.

Adequate funding for veterans. This is another point, Mr. Speaker, I will elaborate a little bit more during this hour of the facts. Like we always say

during the 30-something Working Group, this is not what we came up with. These are the facts and they are backed up by the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD or either a very credible third-party validator. We start looking at that and we look at the Republican budget that passed off this floor. It cuts funding to veterans health care by \$6 billion over the next 5 years. The Democratic alternative budget provides \$8.6 billion more over the next 5 years for veterans health care.

Then there is the GOP budget. It also rejects an increase in TRICARE, which is a health care program for veterans for more than 3 million military retirees and their families. These are increased costs that the Republican budget has put on them, and I am going to talk about that a little further. It targets, as it relates to tax cuts for the middle class, the Republican budget follows the President's budget. That goes back to the rubber-stamp Congress, the rubber-stamp Republican Congress that I talked so much about, Mr. Speaker, and it also happens to be a reality.

When you look at this issue, you have to look at it from the standpoint of the President's budget which provides \$2.5 trillion in tax cuts over the next 10 years targeted for the very wealthiest Americans, the wealthiest taxpayers versus the Democratic alternative that provides \$105 billion for the middle class tax relief such as child tax credit, marriage penalty relief and the 10 percent individual bracket.

I think it is also important for me to point out here as it relates to the issue of college, making college more affordable, and I had to look at this part of the budget and this is another area, Mr. Speaker, that I am going to talk a little bit more about because we have so many people and some middle-aged people. In America, we do know that we have some Americans that do not go from high school straight into college because they have to, nine times out of ten, get a job to be able to build up the money to go to college, to be able to maybe take care of a family member that is up in age and they need that kind of assistance. Or they cannot go off to college or they have to go to a community college before they can go to a 4-year institution. Everyone does not have a turn-key life. So we have to look at policy that is going to be able to help all Americans, not just some.

When we look at the Republican majority budget, what it had in it, this is straight from the budget, this is not anything that I have put together to have some sort of lean towards making our proposals look better than the Republican majority. These are just the facts here in the House. When you look at it, it is identical. Once again, Mr. Speaker, and I think it is important, the reason why I have this rubber stamp back here, that I will proudly bring out in just a few moments, is the fact that the President hands down

what he would like to, the policies that he would like to have here in this Congress, he would like for us to rubber-stamp. And the Republican majority honors him in rubber-stamping exactly the way it was written.

I think it is important, Mr. Speaker, in America, in the people's House, the only House that you have to be elected to, that you cannot be appointed to, over in the Senate you can be appointed by a Governor, that the people should have an opportunity to be heard. Once again, not just Democrats, not just Republicans, not just Independents, not just folks who vote, but the American people should be represented. And for them to be represented appropriately, I think it is important that we have the kind of conversation and dialogue here that is going to benefit all Americans. And in this case it is identical to the President's budget.

It freezes Pell Grants for colleges and denies more than 460,000 students low-cost loans. This also is on the top of \$12 billion cuts in the student loan funding that Republicans just enacted. It is already there. So what we are trying to do is, I believe, to turn that around. And I am going to talk about legislation that we have to turn that around. But as it relates to our alternative budget, it rejects the GOP cuts and higher education programs. It also lowers the costs of student loans by cutting the interest rate per student loan in the fall of 2007. I think that is important.

There are a lot of folks that are sending their kids off to college right now. There are a lot of folks that are writing letters for just \$1,000 scholarships for local organizations because the costs of college have gone up. When we make these cuts here in Washington, DC, the State government has to make their cuts to the students and to the families that live down in those States, and I think it is important that we look at this. And I will talk about that a little further, explaining educational opportunities.

I think it is important when you look at this part of the budget, identical to the Bush budget, well, that seems to be a common theme here, which underfunds No Child Left Behind by 39 percent, denies extra math and reading help to 3.7 million children and shutting 2 million children out of after-school programs.

On the Democratic side, our alternative provides 4.6 billion more dollars in 2007 and \$35.3 billion over the next 5 years for education and training programs, more than the GOP budget. I think this is important for families and parents like myself who know what it means that when your kids go to school you have to pay for aftercare. And nine times out of ten that aftercare is like \$150 to sometimes \$200 a week. Some of you parents know what I am talking about.

Unfortunately, Members of the Republican side of this House do not un-

derstand what you are talking about and opt to invest \$87,000 in tax cuts to millionaires. So I think it is important that we look at this as it relates to a comparison. One other thing that I think is important and justified here in this case, Mr. Speaker, that we roll right into what this means as it relates to the dollars and cents before we get into some of the policy issues that are called out here. We can get right down to the nitty-gritty by saying over the last 5 years President Bush and also the Republican majority here came in and had a projected surplus in the next 10 years when the President took office of \$5.6 trillion, \$5.6 trillion; and that has now turned into a \$3.3 trillion deficit.

Now, it would be kind of hard to say, well, the Democrats took us down that line and they made us do this and they made us do that. I can tell you that is not true. That is not true. We have tried to substitute a number of policies that would save this country in the future and would save our future for our children so they are not paying exorbitant tax and fees that this Republican Congress has put on them and have put on the American people. It affects everything. It affects Social Security. It affects education. It affects our way of being able to come up with alternative fuels. It affects the way our troops are treated when they come back. It affects our veterans. It affects everyday families.

The decisions that are made here on this floor as it relates to the budget and as it relates to the spending affects everyone, all Americans. It affects everyone that depends on this government to govern, not to follow, not to rubber-stamp but to govern. And, Mr. Speaker, I think that is very, very important. When you look at the tax bill that, obviously, the President wanted and the Republican majority rubber-stamped, I think it is important that you look at the fact that we have now mortgaged our children's future.

The Republicans have passed this tax cut which has sunk us deeper, \$80 billion deeper into debt over the next 10 years and will benefit the few, the wealthy. I think it is also important for us to understand that we have to have fiscal discipline.

Let's just talk a little bit about that because I want to make sure that everyone understands what we are talking about here. Well, here is a chart again, Mr. Speaker. It is so self-explanatory. We just continue to use it and use it and use it. The unfortunate part, Mr. Speaker, is that the numbers will change soon. It will not change in the way of saying we are doing better. No, it will change in that we are doing worse. When I say "we," I am saying led by the Republican majority here in the House. Two hundred twenty-four years, \$1.01 trillion borrowed from foreign nations since the President has been President, President Bush and the Republican majority has been in control.

Over the last 4 years, 2001 to 2005, President Bush and the Republican Congress, that is under his picture, have borrowed \$1.05 trillion. I do not care, there is no way you can explain how this is good. No Member, need it be Republican, the one Independent or Democrat on this floor, can explain how this can be good for the American people.

Now, time after time I have asked for an explanation from Republicans during their time when they are on the floor to explain this. All I hear is crickets sounds. I look down the hall, no one is there. I am wondering where the fiscal conservatives in this House are as it relates to the Republican majority. I wonder where the leadership is as it relates to being able to turn this around.

There has been, Mr. Speaker, no attempt and I mean no documented attempt to be able to turn this around. This is unprecedented, the first time in the history of the country. Now, this is not the first time in this century or the first time in the last 20 years or the first time in the last 200 years. This is the first time in the history of the Republic that any Congress and any President has borrowed \$1.05 trillion from foreign nations. The first time. The first time. I mean, it is not like, well, this happened a couple years ago. No. The first time in the history of this country.

Should you be alarmed? You doggone right you should be alarmed. Forty-two Presidents could not do it; 224 years of a country with all of its challenges could not do it. But when you get President Bush in the White House and you get a rubber-stamp Republican majority here in the House of Representatives, they can do it. Unfortunately, if we continue with the same team that we have leading in this House and in the White House, this is going to continue to grow. And it is going to be very, very unfortunate because countries are going to start to disrespect this country because we do not have, not "we," the Republican majority here in this House does not have the ability to govern and to govern in a way that it should following the President, unfortunately, on this issue where we could show clearly that this is not a winner.

Did this chart come from the Democratic Caucus? I think not. These numbers came from the U.S. Department of the Treasury. So you can get on whatever Web site you want to get on and you can find this. You can definitely find it on www.HouseDemocrats.gov/30Something. All of these charts will be there. I suggest you download the chart and print it and show it to your friends because they need to know.

□ 1645

What does it mean when I say folks start to disrespect this country? We get Members coming in this chamber and people giving speeches throughout the country, burning all kinds of Federal jet fuel, talking about terror, talking about what you should be scared of.

I can tell you right now, we need to be dealing with terror and we need to be dealing with it in a smart way and protect the homeland, and that is not happening right now. Take it from me, I am the ranking member on the Homeland Security Subcommittee on Oversight, and I can tell you, it is not happening right now. We have not issued one subpoena to be able to rein in individuals that are stealing from this government, contractors and individuals within the department, that is allowing it to happen. That is another Special Order that I will not get into right now.

But if you want to talk about disrespecting the United States of America, this is not something that is foreign born or someone that released an audiotape or a videotape here. This is what happened right here on the floor.

The borrowing that I talked about over the last 4 years, how did it happen? Japan, \$882.8 billion, bought our debt. Japan did not say, hey, we want y'all to overspend; we want you to give tax cuts to millionaires and billionaires; we want you to do things that you cannot afford to do just because you can. Japan did not say, well, just because the President said we should do it that you should rubber stamp it. No, that is what the Republican Congress did, and we do need a change and we need alternatives. We have talked about those alternatives.

China, \$249.8 billion, they bought our debt, China, red China, Communist China.

The U.K., want to talk about our ally and friend, yeah, they are our friends all right. They bought \$223.2 billion of our debt. We did have the prime minister here. He addressed a joint session. I did not hear him, and I was reading his speech as he was up here, Mr. Speaker, giving his speech. He did not say, hey, keep spending in an irresponsible way so we can buy your debt and own a piece of the American apple pie. He did not say that, but the Republican Congress continues to rubber stamp President's Bush's policies to say that we are being fiscally responsible, meanwhile there is \$1.05 trillion that we borrowed from foreign nations.

Caribbean countries, \$115.3 billion, bought our debt.

Taiwan, \$71.3 billion, little Taiwan. They are even in the game of getting part of this American apple pie. With the Republican Congress giving it away, they are willing to buy it up.

Guess who we owe? We owe every last one of these countries that I have ripped off this chart so far. Canada, just north of us, \$53.8 billion; Korea, \$66.5 billion; Germany, \$65.7 billion.

OPEC Nations, well, you know, Mr. Speaker, OPEC Nations, who are they? Oil producing countries whether it be Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, you name it, these countries are in this OPEC Nation, and they are even in the game of buying a piece of the American apple pie at \$67.8 billion.

Well, I have this kind of flag here that is kind of draped over the United

States of America, and I said we want to get back there, Mr. Speaker. I would urge the Members to do one of two things. One, work in a bipartisan way and pick up pay-as-you-go policies, as we have talked about and have put on this floor here in this House time after time again and saying that if you are going to give \$1 billion to a contractor to do whatever he wants to do with it, without any little oversight, then doggone it, you better figure out how you are going to pay for it. If you are going to give tax cuts to folks who are not asking for them, you better show how you are going to pay for it, not just saying we will borrow from these foreign nations.

We continue to borrow because we can borrow and make history in 4 years that was not accomplished in over 224 years. No, we are going to make history. The Republican majority is going to make history in 4 years at \$1.05 trillion. That is a lot of money with a big T. 224 years, \$1.01 trillion. Forty-two Presidents could not even muster up that. If you want to get back to a balanced budget that I talked about earlier, that I am going to continue to pound on, then have a Democratic majority or work in a bipartisan way, one of the two.

I have more faith in the fact of the Democratic majority getting the job done than the Republicans allowing us to work in a bipartisan way towards having a balanced budget.

You want to talk about partisanship, partisanship over the budget is at the highest level that it could be, because you have one side with the will and the desire to balance the budget, and you have the other side, Republican majority, that says they want to balance the budget but do not have the will and the desire to do it. That is the side-by-side on that. You have to have the will and the desire to do it.

I cannot go to my daughter and say, Lauren, I want you to go out and play softball. Well, she may not have the will and the desire to play softball, but just because I have the will and desire does not necessarily mean that she has to have it.

Well, guess what, on this side of the ball, we have the will and the desire to balance the budget. Not only do we have the will and the desire, history is on our side. History is on our side because we balanced the budget. We actually did it. The Democratic House did it without one Republican vote, not one. Maybe I could say maybe two, three, four—not one Republican vote. We balanced the budget and put this country in surplus. We could have dealt with Social Security, could have took it beyond the time it is supposed to have issues, could have made sure that veterans did not have to pay copayments, could have made sure that we could have been ahead as it relates, not to below the 39 percent in funding Leave No Child Behind, could have provided more tax cuts for the middle class. It is what it is.

And I would tell you, if folks want to get back to a balanced budget and not have these countries, in all due respect, in our pocket—these countries have their hand in our pocket, not because of the folks that are running around here trying to make a living every day. It is because of the Republican majority, what they have done.

OPEC Nations got their hands straight in our pocket. Germany has their hand in our pocket at \$6.7 billion, the U.S. taxpayers pocket. Korea \$66.5 billion, they have their hands in our pocket. Taiwan, \$71.3 billion, have their hands in our pocket. Canada, \$53.8 billion, have their hands in the American taxpayers' pocket. Caribbean countries, \$115.3 billion, have their hands in the American taxpayers' pocket. The U.K., \$223.2 billion, have their hands in the American taxpayers' pocket. And China have a hand-and-a-half in the American taxpayers' pocket and reaching for their credit card while they are at it at \$249.8 billion.

Japan has just outright snatched the wallet out of the back of the taxpayers pocket and grabbed someone's pocketbook and have their hand in the pocket of the U.S. taxpayers at \$682.8 billion. Not because the American people went out there and said let us make sure that we spend money that we do not have and let us make records in 4 years in borrowing money from foreign nations. The Republican majority, they have rubber stamped the Bush administration policy and here we are.

So what do we do? What we do is we make changes, and what we have tried to do on this side is do exactly that. It would be hard for me, Mr. Speaker, as a member of the Republican Conference to come to this floor and speak with a straight face about the issue on the budget. I do not know. I would have to go into the bathroom and look in the mirror and practice because it would be hard for me to keep a straight face when I come to the floor to talk about the fact that I am a fiscal conservative and I care about the budget and responsible spending and making sure that we do not overspend and we are not like the others, we do not spend.

Well, let me tell you something. The congressional record says that you spend. The American people are noticing that you spend and borrow, and spend and borrow, and spend, and when you cannot borrow anymore, you go to foreign Nations and you borrow.

Well, this is what we have tried to do. Mr. SPRATT's substitute amendment to House Concurrent Resolution 95, 2006 budget resolution, failed, 228 Republican votes against it. Not one voted for it. This is pay-as-you-go. Once again, if you are going to spend \$1 million, where are you going to get the \$1 million from? That is all we ask. It was identified, and this opportunity for the Republican majority to vote for fiscal opportunity, no. They said no.

Mr. SPRATT again, amendment to House Concurrent Resolution 393, 2005

budget resolution, failed. Republicans, 224 voted no. Zero voted for it. Reminds me, Mr. Speaker, of when we balanced the budget, zero. It is almost like the old saying, put your money where your mouth is. Well, put your vote where your mouth is. That is what I am saying and that is what the American people are going to say hopefully in November.

Bottom line is folks can come to the floor, we can have these big floor debates and come close to making each other mad, but in the final analysis, when the budget is printed and the deficit continues to go up, the fact is is that the Democrats are for fiscal responsibility and the Republican majority, rubber stamping President Bush's policy, is for continuing to borrow from foreign Nations and putting them in the pockets of the American people.

Now, I think it is important that we continue to talk about this issue as it relates to veterans. Veterans of all people, despite the serious problem in military recruiting, the President's budget will increase health care costs and deny health care for millions of veterans and military retirees. I think it is important that we look at these increases that have happened for a million veterans for the fourth year in a row, the budget rises, health care costs for 1 million veterans, by imposing new fees.

For most of them, veterans' cost will rise some \$2.6 billion over the next 5 years and also drive at least 200,000 veterans out of assistance. It will double the copayments for prescription drugs from \$8 to \$15 and impose an enrollment fee of \$250 a year for a Category 7 or 8 veteran, who makes very little, makes \$26,000 a year.

I think it is also important for us to look at the increases in health care costs for military retirees. The budget increased TRICARE health care premiums, which is the health care provided to the military for \$3.1 million, for the Nation's military retirees under 65. I think it is important that we look at these premiums and look at what they are costing the folks that signed up to defend this country and allow us to salute one flag. I think it is also important for us to look at what we are talking about on this side of the aisle Mr. Speaker.

The GI Bill of Rights for the 21st Century that has been offered here on the Democratic side will just do the reverse as it relates to what I just mentioned. It makes health care accessible and affordable for our veterans and improves veterans' health care. It improves mental health for returning soldiers.

A number of the IEDs, improvised explosive devices, I think is going to affect a number of our troops, those that have fallen victim to it and survived, injured, those that have witnessed IEDs going off, those that have to worry every day when they drive down one of the streets in Iraq, will they be hit by an IED.

□ 1700

Some of that stuff is going to come back home, and it is home, and we need to be able to deal with it on a psychological standpoint because it affects many of our families. These are individuals that have signed up and said they wanted to serve our country, and they are serving.

It also blocks the increase in prescription drug copayments and the enrollment fee for veterans. I think it is important that we do that. And on this side of the aisle, we have that legislation that has been put forth through our frustration of the fact that we can't work in a bipartisan way. The only way we can work in a bipartisan way, Mr. Speaker, is if the Republican leadership allows bipartisanship to work in the House.

Now, how does that happen? Well, when you have a conference committee, how about inviting the Democratic members to that conference committee, or at least letting us know where the meeting is? We have day after day, especially this time of year, when we have a number of pieces of legislation stacked up on top of one another. And I just want to make sure that I break this down so everyone understands. When we pass a bill here in the House, and the Senate passes a similar bill, they have what they call a conference committee, and that conference committee sits down and works out the differences between those bills. Well, that is not a common thing here in the House. Yes, it would be a majority of Republicans that will be on that conference committee, but there are some Democrats on that conference committee. And we have a number of Democrats, when the meeting is set and the decision is made, that are not even told about it.

That is not working in a bipartisan way, and that is why our Democratic leader has said that when Democrats take control of this House, we will work in a bipartisan way and we will make sure that the American people are represented. If they have a Republican representing them here, then they will be represented. Because, guess what? It will not be a stonewall. It will be a democracy in the way that we are supposed to carry out business here in this House, of making sure that everyone benefits. That is true bipartisanship.

It also provides benefits to veterans who have earned and deserve respect. It ends the disability veterans tax. It reduces waiting time on disability claimants and also expands outreach to veterans.

Now, this is very, very important. We are talking about individuals coming back and moving back into their community, going to church or synagogue, or what have you, to mosque, what have you, and when they come back home to their families, we are saying that we want a government, and the Department of Veterans Affairs that will work with that veteran, will work

with that family in making sure that because they signed up, he or she signed up to go out on behalf of this country and fight on behalf of this country, that we have their back. That is the least that we can do.

That is what this GI Bill of Rights of the 21st Century will do, and I would urge the Members to go on Housedemocrats.gov and get a copy of that piece of legislation so that you can take a look at it and hopefully endorse it and hopefully help us pass it. We will need that very much.

I said I would talk about the student loans, Mr. Speaker, and I think it is important. We have a piece of legislation, and when I say "we," the Democratic side, we have a piece of legislation that reverses what the Republican majority has done with the endorsement of the Bush administration. Of course, whatever the President wants, the Republican majority in this House will give it to him.

Earlier this year, the Congress cut \$12 billion out of the Federal student loan program in order to help finance tax breaks for the wealthiest Americans. I think it is also important that most of the savings generated from the cuts to student loans continues the practice of forcing students and parents to borrow, in many cases to pay for the expensive increase in the rates as relates to student loans. By increasing college loans, parents have to go out and borrow.

Well, now, the Republican majority is pushing their philosophy on the American people. Because the Republican majority has decided to take away from the student aid and student loan program to give special interest tax breaks to wealthy individuals here in the United States of America, the American people are now forced to go to the credit union. They are forced to put their house up even a little bit more to pay for college because this majority, coupled with the President's policies, has done this.

We are going to reverse that. We are going to reduce and replenish the dollars that were taken out of the budget and were placed in special interest projects that the Republican majority did, and it is called Reversing the Raid on Student Aid Act. It is H.R. 5150. It would help make college more affordable. It would cut interest rates in half as relates to the borrowers, those that are borrowing money; and also it would subsidize student loans from a fixed rate of 6.8 to a fixed rate of 3.4. It also cuts the rates on parent loans for undergraduate students from a fixed rate of 8.5 to a fixed rate of 4.25.

I think it is important for us to look at those numbers, because that is a drastic cut, taking us back to families being able to afford to send their kids to college. Under the bill, a typical undergraduate student has something like \$17,500 in debt and would save \$5,600 over the life of his or her loan. I think it is important for us to look at that, Mr. Speaker. And that is the

complete opposite of what has been put forth thus far.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think it is important for us to look at the issue on energy, but I wanted to make sure I went through my list here that I said I would go through. We talked about fiscal responsibility, we have talked about veterans, we have also talked about making college more affordable; and, yes, Mr. Speaker, we are on the issue of energy.

I think when you start looking at energy, you can't look at investing in the Middle East. We want to invest in the Midwest. When we invest in the Midwest, it is investing in America and not just investing in special interests. The Republican majority way of doing things, and also the Bush White House way of doing things is to sit down with oil companies and cut secret deals, to have them write the energy policy in this country, to trust oil companies to make the decisions and run the energy policy here in the United States of America.

Well, the folks didn't sign up for oil companies to have a vote here on this floor. The American people didn't go vote one early Tuesday morning to allow someone from ExxonMobil to come in here and vote on the floor.

Case in point: again, Washington Post, third-party validator, November 16, 2005, front page: "White House documents showed executives from big oil companies met with Vice President Cheney's energy task force in 2001, something long suspected by environmentalists but denied as recently as November of 2005 last week by industry officials testifying before Congress. The document obtained this week by The Washington Post shows that officials from ExxonMobil Corp., and Phillips, Shell Oil Company, and B.P. of America met in the White House complex with Cheney aides who were developing a national energy policy, part of which became law, part of which is still being debated here in Congress."

I think it is important that we look at it from that standpoint. And while I am on the individuals who are saying that they want to help so much in alternative fuels, take a look at this. Nothing like third-party validators. I love them. I really do, Mr. Speaker. I love third-party validators because the reason you have to have them is that some of this stuff is just hard to believe.

Someone may be in their office saying, I do not know what that Member from Florida is talking about right now. Well, I want to show them as many third-party validators as possible, because it is truly unbelievable. When I was elected to Congress some 4 years ago, I didn't think we would even be in the posture we are in now because I thought maybe bipartisanship would prevail, or common sense on behalf of the country would prevail. But what has happened is that because special interests, through the K Street Project, where special interests had an

opportunity to have access into this process that was so-called no longer going on, we are where we are now. That article I just read.

And here is a picture of a gas pump. We talk about alternative fuels, and we have CEOs going on the "Today Show" and all these other little shows and all talking about, oh, we believe in alternative fuels. Well, as you can see, you have your Regular, Special, and then you have your Super Plus, then you have this thing called E-85, which is ethanol, which is an alternative fuel. Right here in the United States of America.

Well, I want you to pay very close attention to what these two stickers are saying here. Basically, it is saying that you cannot use your ExxonMobil card to buy E-85. That is interesting. You can walk in that ExxonMobil place and buy, what, a bag of chips with your card? You can go in there and buy a case of soda, if you want to. Some individuals even go in and buy a pack of cigarettes with their ExxonMobil card. But you can't buy E-85, which is an alternative fuel.

Now, I mean, yes, they are a company and all, and they can do what they want to do. But you know what is different about ExxonMobil and everyone else, not just that company, but oil companies in general? Man, they are backed and certified by this Republican majority here. They are getting record-breaking tax breaks and gifts from this House. Man, they can't give the oil companies enough. I mean, goodness gracious, access in the White House, they get to sit down with the administration and talk about how it should be written: on this line, this is what we want. No, we shouldn't do that because, you know, I don't know.

Now, I am not a Member of Congress with a conspiracy theory, but record-breaking profits, record-breaking subsidies and gifts given to the oil industry? Some may say on behalf of innovation. I say it has a lot to do with the record-breaking profits, especially when they do not have to spend their money, spend the taxpayers' money, and the shareholders run away and laugh, going to the bank, but they are not willing to allow people who come to their station to use their ExxonMobil card to buy E-85, which is an alternative fuel. These are the individuals who have access into this Republican majority and into the White House.

Let's talk about the profits. Wow, let's look at this. We said that meeting happened in 2001 in the White House complex. In 2002, these are the oil companies' record profits: \$34 billion in profits. I think their policy is working, for them. \$59 billion in profits. I think it is getting better. I think that was a good meeting. \$84 billion in 2004. \$84 billion in profits. Man, I am glad I went to that meeting, that task force in the Republican Congress with the rubber-stamp that made that happen. \$113 billion. Wow, I can't wait until the 2006

numbers when they come in. I think we can go out and get about eight more Lear jets and I will take that home that I've been dreaming about.

You know what it means? It is on the backs of the taxpayers. And I want to make sure everyone sees this chart and understands what is going on, because I am also hopping mad, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that for those of us who serve in public service, we wish we would have a retirement like this after going to all those town hall meetings, going out talking to all those American people and coming here early in the morning, leaving late at night, working every day, and then here we are.

Now, I am not going to identify him as an individual, I am just saying it is what it is, and this is what is happening: \$398 million in a retirement package and \$2 million in tax breaks. A \$2 million tax break. That is how you get rewarded.

Now, it goes against logic, Mr. Speaker, for someone to say, you know, we are for finding alternative fuels and we are for saving the taxpayers money, but meanwhile they are making record-breaking profits. I wonder what the speech that they give not on the "Today Show" or not on one of the news shows, I wonder what the speech is that they give before their shareholders.

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The speech that they are giving is saying thanks to the Republican majority in the House, thanks to the President of the United States, the future looks good. We are going to have a great year.

I think it is important for us to look at investing in the Midwest versus the Middle East, and E-85 is a big part of the plan. I want to bring Members' attention to this document that they can find on HouseDemocrats.gov and how we can start making ourselves energy independent in a matter of years. It's not just a philosophy and not just a speech. It is not someone just saying maybe one day we could, but saying we can.

In this document it says we are looking to increase production of American-made biofuels, using things like corn and sugarcane, sugar beets, things that we have right here, coal. Alternative fuels that we have here in the United States. We do not need to go to foreign countries and hear from people from South America and the Middle East, and having the President say it's not us, it is the fact that the American people are addicted to oil. I mean, that is a statement that I think you need to let sink in.

It also will make sure that the biodiesel, that we have a way to be able to increase that, expand tax credits for ethanol and biodiesel through 2015, and increase tax benefits to small biofuel producers. It expands also the market for distribution of biofuels. That is going to be important, Mr. Speaker.

Oil companies are just not going to do it because it is the right thing to do. We are going to have to make them do it so we can wean ourselves off of this addiction to oil. We want to give them an alternative. We do not just want to talk about it, we want to give the American people an alternative so they can move in that direction.

We talk about increasing the number of gas stations offering E-85 through new initiatives and requirements to make sure that we get the oil companies to do so.

In 7 years, 75 percent of all cars made in America would be flex fuel cars. Those are cars that can take the E-85 and can take regular gas. I think it is important for us to head in that direction. I think it is important for the future of our country, and I think it is important to have a true debate and a true philosophy towards alternative fuels and saving money.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think it is important for us to be able to do the things that we talk about and we preach about. The Republican majority is going to have to drop this stamp. It is going to have to give it up. You are going to have to go to group and say "We can no longer rubber stamp whatever the President of the United States sends to the Congress." The President wants tax cuts for wealthy Americans, they have to say Mr. President, we cannot do it.

Now for the Republican majority to have group, it is going to have to make a change in philosophy. They may have to work in a bipartisan way. They may even have to take a Democratic proposal, the pay-as-you-go philosophy, and make a change. I personally feel the Republican majority is not capable of doing that.

I have been on this floor going on 3 years. If I thought it made a difference in the Republican majority and encouraging them to work in a bipartisan way, then I would feel a little more encouraged, but I do not. I think the Republican majority knows exactly what the 30-something Working Group talks about when we come to the floor. We talk about fiscal responsibility and respecting hardworking Americans. We talk about making sure that we do right by our children and that we educate our children at all levels, whether it be K-12 experience, higher education, postgraduate, making sure that we have the workforce to compete with other countries that are competing against us.

I am not talking about competing against the school down the street or the school in the other county. We are competing against other countries as it relates to math and the sciences. That is talk for the Republican majority. We have a true mission. We have the will and desire on this side, through our innovation agenda which is on HouseDemocrats.gov, the Republican majority has to stop rubber stamping.

And I can tell you right now, they can't help it. They just continue to hit

the rubber stamp. Let's not even have a committee hearing, let us just get this bill to the floor and get it out because that is what the President wants. We have a number of issues that the Republican Congress has rubber stamped. One was \$1.05 trillion in record-breaking borrowing from foreign nations, rubber stamped, no problem. Deficits as far as the eye can see. Yes, you can have all of the study groups and all of the folks that write documents, and you can have all of the Republican Members come to this floor, but the reality is that this Congress has overseen the largest increase in the deficit in the history of the Republic, period.

Go to CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, pick up the newspaper, it's there. The Republican Congress, the only way I think that the Republican Congress is going to change its ways is when we have real leadership in this House. And the only way we do that is when the Democratic Caucus becomes the majority caucus in this House on this floor to put in the policies that need to be placed in the statute books, in the budget, in committee and making sure that we put this country back on the fiscal track it should be on.

How can I say that with boldness? Because we have done. It's almost like a job application. Someone tells you they can do something and you don't see it on their résumé that they have actually done it, it is hard to believe they can do it. It is on our résumé without one Republican vote balancing the budget.

I think it is also important to get the Republican Congress of the rubber stamp so you're making sure that they don't have the ability to rubber stamp. When you have the ability to rubber stamp, you are in the majority and that is what the American people are going to have to speak to, Mr. Speaker.

I am hoping we are able to see some change in philosophy here in the House. And we encourage the Members, if you want to share your thoughts or comments or you have other alternative ideas, we want to hear them because we believe in working in a bipartisan way. HouseDemocrats.gov/30somethingworkinggroup.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I would like to thank our working group that met earlier this week a couple of days ago, and I would also like to thank the staff and thank everyone that takes part in what we do and why we come to the floor. I would like to thank the Democratic leader for the time.

Mr. Speaker, it was an honor addressing the House of Representatives.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to:

Mr. BECERRA (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today after 11:00 a.m.

Mr. COSTELLO (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today on account of attending the funeral of a relative.